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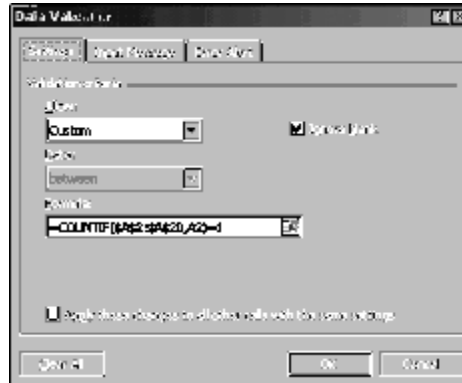
Preventing duplicate data entry

When you set up a worksheet to collect data, you may often wish to prevent someone from entering a duplicate entry. For example, you may wish that an invoice number or a customer name is entered only once in a list. You can use **Validation** to enter a formula to catch entry of duplicate data.

1. Select a range of cells where data will be entered. For this example, select cells A2:A20.

2. Choose **Data, Validation**.
3. Select the **Settings** tab.

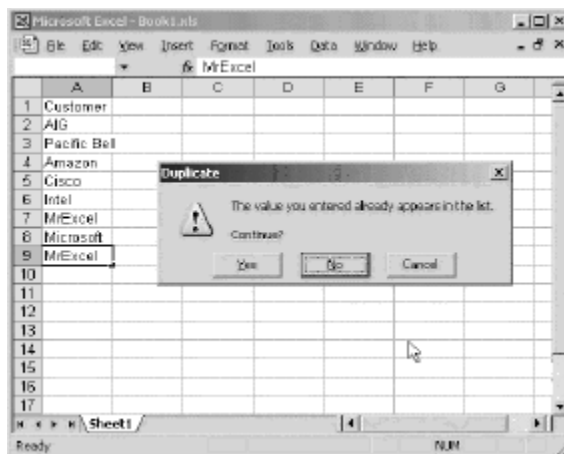
4. In the **Allow** box, select **Custom**.



Note – After selecting Custom, the title of the third box in the dialog box has changed to **Formula**.

Enter the following formula into the box: =COUNTIF(\$A\$2:\$A\$20,A2)=1

5. Select the **Error Alert** tab.
6. In the **Title** box, enter **Duplicate**.
7. In the **Error message** box, enter **The value you entered already appears in the list.**



This technique relies on the COUNTIF function. The COUNTIF function will count how many entries in the input range A2:A20 match the cell that was just entered. We will always expect this number to be 1. If the result of the CountIf is higher, this means that the recently entered cell already exists elsewhere in the list. In this case, the Data Validation will take over and alert the user that the value has already been entered.

This tip, as well as hundreds more tips appear in “Mr Excel ON EXCEL” (Holy Macro Books, 480 pages, ISBN 0-9724258-3-7, \$35.95) by Bill Jelen (www.MrExcel.com) and Joseph Rubin (www.ExcelTip.com). Ask for the book at your local bookseller or buy it online.